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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 000292

SIPDIS

STATE PASS EUR/WE FOR KATHERINE SHARP, EUR/PGI FOR NERISSA  
COOK AND JEN ELBRIDGE, AND IO/RHS FOR GAYATRI PATEL AND AMY  
OSTERMEIER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2019

TAGS: [PREL PHUM BE](#)

SUBJECT: BELGIUM ON US PARTICIPATION IN THE UNHRC AND  
POSTURE ON THE DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE

REF: A. STATE 18282

[1](#)B. BRUSSELS 238

Classified By: Acting DCM Richard Eason for reason 1.4 (B) and (D).

UN Human Rights Council  
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[1](#)1. (C) Poloff shared reftel A points February 27 with MFA  
Human Rights Attache Nathalie Rondeux. Rondeux immediately  
focused on the final talking point on the UN Human Rights  
Council (UNHRC), that the U.S. has not decided whether to  
seek a seat or not. She said Belgium was one of three  
candidates (Belgium, Norway, and New Zealand) running  
unopposed for the three open seats in the WEOG (Western)  
group. Rondeux said an U.S. candidacy could affect Belgium's  
chances of gaining a seat. However, she noted that it is  
customary for an EU member to be selected for a seat each  
year, and Belgium was the only member in the running. She  
underscored the importance to Belgium of sitting on the  
UNHRC. Belgium has been the harshest critic of the UNHRC  
within the EU, and plans to raise its concerns and work to  
make the council function better if it obtains a seat.

[1](#)2. (U) Rondeux said Belgium welcomes the U.S. decision to  
participate again in the UNHRC. She hoped the U.S. would be  
an active observer and join in negotiations. Belgium is  
ready to work with the U.S. delegation, though there may be  
differences on certain subjects. One resolution on which she  
predicted differing U.S. - EU positions was the resolution to  
be introduced by Mexico on human rights and terrorism.  
Belgium will coordinate the EU common position and defend it  
at the UNHRC. She added that in the past, the mood was  
always constructive, even when the U.S. and the EU disagreed.

U.S. Posture on the Durban Review Conference  
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[1](#)3. (C) Rondeux was less generous in her reaction to the U.S.  
decision to stop negotiations on the draft text for the  
Durban Review Conference. Rondeux reminded Poloff Belgium  
was committed to working and negotiating to obtain a good  
document as reported in reftel B. She characterized the U.S.  
decision to pull out, wait for others to do the heavy  
negotiating, and then consider returning at the end, if the  
U.S. likes the document, as unfair. Belgium felt that the  
U.S. presence at the last meeting improved the atmosphere  
during the negotiations. Belgium will participate in the  
working group, and Rondeux predicted that a significantly  
improved and shorter text will be drafted by the end of  
March. She said Belgium and Europe share most of the U.S.  
concerns and that most controversial language would likely be  
removed, especially the language referring to defamation of  
religion. The one U.S. redline she said would be difficult

to achieve, and which the Europeans would not support, was the second point from reftel A, regarding the reaffirmation of the previous Durban document. Belgium and the Europeans stayed and negotiated this document in 2001, and supported it as a good compromise. Rondeux said Belgium suggested the paragraph that affirms the Durban document in the review draft and views this paragraph as the best way to shorten the text, another U.S. goal.

14. (U) As a final point, Rondeux offered an observation on what she described as different U.S. and European "theological" views of the concept of race. She said Europe does not accept the division of humankind into races, and referred to a UN finding that there is only one human race. She said the EU would discuss ethnic identity, origin, color, and other differences that were "real". Rondeux commented that U.S. categorization of people into different races was curious from the European point of view.

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